

Sinclair Broadcasting's decision to force their stations to air an anti-Kerry documentary days before the election is a clear example of the dangers of media consolidation.

By airing the anti-Kerry documentary during prime-time slots, Sinclair is effectively donating money (the money which would have bought programming and advertising slots during that air time) to the Bush campaign. What this amounts to, at the bare minimum, is an indirect illegal donation of funds. Moreover, although universities across the country are banning the appearance of Michael Moore, and other large television companies are refraining from criticizing the President (because these things are "too political" for an election year), Sinclair's decision to air the anti-Kerry film (created by Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, an organization already suspect in the eyes of the FEC) amounts to unbalanced proselytization for the Bush campaign. While I strongly support the right of free speech, it is important that Sinclair, with access to much more "speech" than the average American, not use their privilege to bad-mouth a candidate for president.

Sinclair uses the public airwaves free of charge, and is obligated by law to serve the public interest. But when large companies control the airwaves, we get more of what's good for the bottom line and less of what we need for our democracy. Instead of something produced at "News Central" far away, it's more important that we see real people from our own communities and more substantive news about issues that matter.

Sinclair's actions show why we need to strengthen media ownership rules, not weaken them. They show why the license renewal process needs to involve more than a returned postcard. Thank you.